Depot Town Rag

Volume 21, Number 3

July 2006

Back to our monthly format for as long as you can stand it

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. P.O. Box 970235,, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

Elvis extravaganza benefits many

Michigan Elvisfest honors the life and accomplishments of the rock 'n' roll legend, Elvis Presley. The seventh annual event will be held in Riverside Park July 7 & 8 and will include top international tribute artists plus other family-friendly events.

Coverage: "Publicity for Michigan Elvisfest is staggering," says director Mary Decker. "The event was covered by over 100 radio stations through the state and beyond last year. Articles appeared in major newspapers from across the county…as well as several Internet publications. Michigan Elvisfest tribute artists have made appearances on WDIV-TV (NBC) and FOX-2. The festival was featured on Web sites and newsletters of Elvis Fan Clubs across North America, including eighty-one clubs within a four-hour drive of Ypsilanti."

Use of Funds: All profits from the festival are donated to charity. Monies generated by the Depot Town Association will be used to help fund:

- Transitional housing for children
- Summer camp for under-privileged children
- Physical improvement of city parks
- Construction of park playgrounds
- Other public projects
- Mott Children's Hospital – collection of new stuffed toys & phone cards
- Salvation Army collection of miscellaneous items

The Michigan Elvisfest is organized by the Ypsilanti Depot Town Association, www. mielvisfest.com

Donor/Sponsors for Elvisfest may participate on several levels:

Blue Suede Shoes ($500-$999)
Hound Dogs ($1000-$1999)
Teddy Bears ($2000-$4999)
Kings ($5000 and up)

All proceeds are donated to charity

Elvis® is a registered trademark of Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc.

Michigan Elvisfest®

July 7 & 8

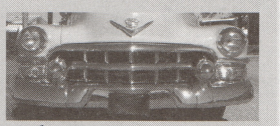
Friday, 5 p.m. – midnight
Saturday, noon – midnight
in historic Depot Town

Riverside Park

www.mielvisfest.com

Elvis's Cadillacs:

1954 Cadillac
1954 Series 75 Fleetwood Limousine
1955 Fleetwood 60 Special
1955 Series 75 Fleetwood Limousine
1956 Eldorado

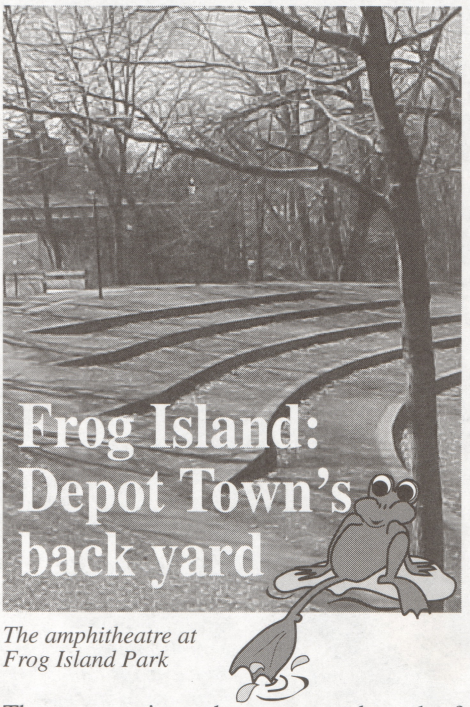


1956 Sedan
1957 Seville
1957 Limousine
1957 Eldorado Brougham
1958 Limousine
1959 Cadillac
1960 Series 75 Feetwood Limousine
1962 Convertible
1965 Eldorado Convertible

1967 Eldorado
1967 Coupe de Ville
1968 Eldorado Coupe
1968 Sedan de Ville
1971 Sedan de Ville
1972 Station Wagon
1973 Sedan
1974 Fleetwood Brougham
1976 Fleetwood Eldorado
1976 Seville

1976 Seville
1976 Fleetwood
1977 Seville
1977 Sedan de Ville
1977 Miller-Meteor Landau Traditional Cadillac Hearse

…then there's an even longer list of The Cadillacs that Elvis gave away!



The amphitheatre at Frog Island Park

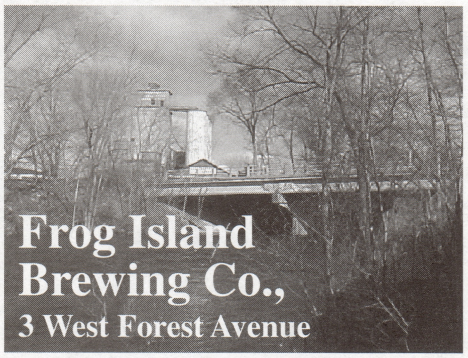
There was a time when we tossed much of our waste into the Huron River. Some say it's the traditional ethic of looking downstream with contempt. Upstream citizens were considered upscale simply because they polluted the water first. Downstream folks learned to live with it.

In mid-nineteenth century, 53 mills dipped into the water between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti and most of them poured their refuse right back into it.

Henry Ford impounded the river south of town and created Ford Lake which, by the 1990s, turned brilliant green in late summer from its blooming phosphorus content.

All that is changing and Ypsilanti's unique parks at the western edge of Depot Town are good examples of a new ethic. Riverside Park and Frog Island are not only home to community festivals and events, but also serve families throughout the year for picnics, fishing, strolling, bike riding, exercise, sporting events, and even romantic moonlight liasons.

This issue of *The Rag* features facts and fables from Frog Island, featuring those businesses adjacent to our unique city park.



North across the Huron River from Frog Island is the Frog Island Beer/Brewery where supplies will be sold for micro brewers

David French tells how his Frog Island Brewing Company got its start around the tables of Depot Town taverns, and says it was Judi Monaghan who named the beer. "And it was Steve Gross who came up with the motto, 'It's the hops!'," remembers French, who, along with his brothers and sister, grew up around their dad's Alibi Bar.

Frog Island's beers, first brewed in Frankenmuth—now in Marshall—features the local brand "Will Stewart's Pale Ale," and seasonal brews throughout the year. It's on tap at all the local taverns.

A very local Frog Sauce

Sharryl Sullivan offers up some Frog Island BBQ Sauce at Ypsilanti's Farmers' Market—with the same logo found on the historic local beer

"Send junior to the tavern for a bucket of beer"

1826 - The "Old distillery" at the Michigan Ave. bridge purchased by Ballard and Edmunds who operate it until 1845

1854 - Sons of Temperance disbands

1861-1876 - Jacob Grob's Eagle Brewery is Ypsi's first brewery.

1869 - Grove Brewery is begun by Tanfkirth and Trockembrod

1877 - Andrew J. Leetch continues Eagle Brewery at East Congress Street (Michigan Avenue) A.J. Leetch & Co. manufactures pumps at same location. Historians say there was more money in pumps than beer.

1886 - Ypsi prohibition campaign begins

1871-1880s - Growing temperance sentiment accompanies elections.

1894-5 - Ypsilanti Law & Order League brings Blue-Ribboners and other temperance orators to rally against saloons. Michigan Liquor Distributors Protective Association holds a "great public picnic" here.

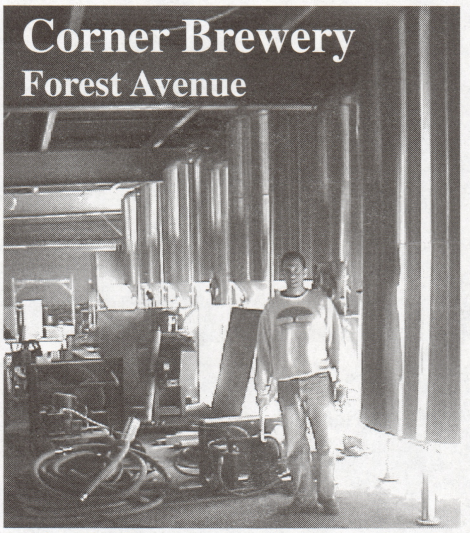
1910 - Frank Swaine's Malt House (once a school) is torn down. A portion of the wall still stands on the property line of 111 E. Forest.

1916 - Michigan is first state to vote "dry" for Prohibition

1916-1932 - "Dry Spell" in America

1932 - Volstead Act repealed, Prohibition ends; breweries and bars bounce back.

2006 - Original traditions carry on at Frog Island Beer, Corner Brewery, Sidetrack, Frenchie's, Sticks, Aubree's, and Cady's.



Matt Greff, preparing tanks just purchased from a brewerly in Arizona for the opening of his new microbrewery in Ypsilanti

Fifteen-year residents of Ypsilanti, Detroit kid Matt Greff met Rene at Kalamazoo College and traces his Polish/German/French lineage back to a Greff Brewery in Nancy, France. "Brewing is in my genes," he says.

Their Corner Brewery on E. Forest Avenue at Norris Street opened in May, and plans to be fully operational by this month. In addition to a serving area and small food service, an old fashioned outdoor beer garden is planned for the future.

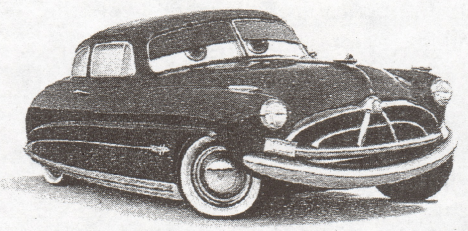
Divinatory arts group reads and converses

"Thursday Gatherings for Astrologers and Friends" are held at Café Luwak every Thursday, from May 4- August 31 from 6-9 p.m. (no Gathering on August 17).

These weekly meetings make it possible for astrologers to trade readings with one another or offer mini-readings to the general public. Other practitioners of the divinatory arts—such as psychics, numerologists, clairvoyants, tarot card, palm, tealeaf, or runes readers—are invited and encouraged to join these gatherings. Most will charge about a dollar per minute.

"This is a welcoming environment," says Bon Rose Fine, to either do readings or enjoy stimulating conversation about metaphysical matters.

For more information or to make arrangements to be a reader, please contact Bon Rose Fine at 734-434-4555 or bonrosefine@comcast.net.



The face is familiar

With all the classic Hudson automobiles exhibited on this block, this old car (above) is probably more familiar than the voice, but that's Paul Newman you will hear behind the Hudson car character in *Cars*, Pixar' s animated movie that came to local theaters this summer. Newman sounds like he probably knows Jack Miller (Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Collection, Hudson dealership) and the Sobbry brothers (red City Body logo on their signs and building) as close, personal friends. He fits in just fine down here.

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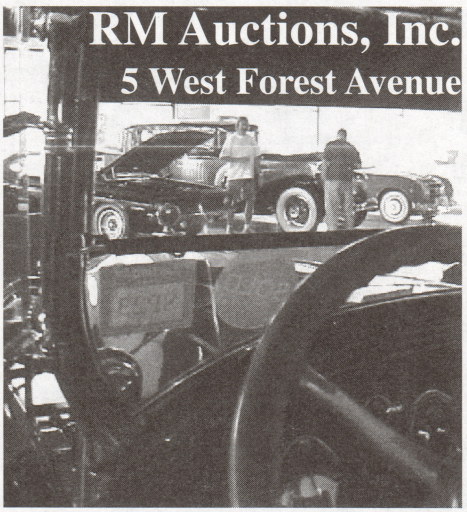


Just west of Frog Island on the west bank of the Huron River, Ken Wallace manages RM Auctions, Inc., a showroom and staging facility for some of the classiest classic cars on the world market. Open to walk-in tourists as well as big-ticket buyers, Wallace preps restored cars for such places as the Novi auto auctions. The former Riverside/Farm Bureau building has seen major changes since RM Classic Cars developed this facility as a drop-point for their international business in1999.

EMU intern serves in Depot Town

April Meehleder, an Eastern Michigan University senior from Saginaw, has joined DTA's Marketing Committee to bring fresh ideas to the promotion of the neighborhood. Helping to plan for Heritage Festival and other events on the block, Meehleder has offered many creative suggestions to help enhance the district as a dynamic tourist destination.

Recent Marketing Committee meetings have seen unique promotional ideas flow from her contribution to the group and those sessions are open to all who can show up at 9 a.m. any Thursday at Café Luwak.

"We'll send in a failing grade to EMU," says DTA president Gary McKeever, "just so she'll have to take it over again." DTA activists agree that Meehleder's contribution has been valuable beyond any credit hours she might be receiving from Eastern.

Mark Twain's newspaper carried his famed frog story for the first time and Ypsilanti also tried the concept once ... unsuccessfully

Our heritage: Frog torture

An early Heritage Festival event once attempted to replicate the famous "Celebrated Jumping Frog" contest of Calaveras County, California, the first internationally published writing of American humorist Samuel Clemens.

In a gruesome Ypsilanti Heritage Fest version of that famous short story, a giant black plastic tarpaulin was stretched across the lawn in Riverside Park and, after absorbing the sun's rays for several hours, local tots were encouraged to place their recently-caught frog contestants on the black, shiny circle to see which could jump the farthest, the highest, or most often.

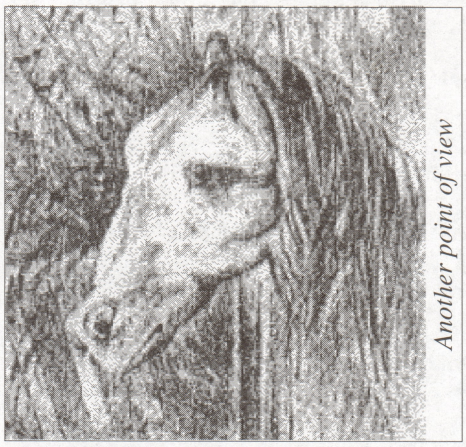
Some did not move at all; they died instantly from the shock of the heat. Others limped around, from hot spot to hot spot, finding no relief from the pain.

Children cried, mothers wept, sensitive observers called the ASPCA, and event organizers consulted insurance company reps for extra liability in public, charitable events.

Frogs are known to croak during their mating season, but apparently have no such voice to announce pain. They croaked anyway.

Worse than a literal Fish Fry, the Frog Toss and Kitten Squash events have not been repeated as annual events to honor Ypsilanti's heritage.

Another point of view



"What shall we call this place?" asked the first visitor to the old island park in Ypsilanti.

"We could name it Horse Island after the horses we rode in on," said his friend.

"Nah. Let's call it Frog Island," said the first, for he was lying down on his side.

(Turn the above picture sideways)

Frog fax:

Michigan is home to 13 native species of anurans (frogs and toads).

A colorful tale *(and torso!)*

EMU closed Briggs Field in 1948 for renovation and Roosevelt High used Ypsi High's football field on Frog Island that year. Harold Britton and Eugene Seidel were juniors at Ypsi High and decided to sneak across the Huron River to watch the Rough Riders' football game one Friday night.

"We didn't know it," remembers Britton, "but the Paper Mill had flushed their dyes into the river that day. We took off our shoes and socks, rolled up our pants and waded across." The Huron was low at that time of year and only up to the kids' knees. "We were covered with every color of the rainbow," says Britton. "We had to soak for at least three days to get those colors off!"

Others say that was the year Ypsilanti High changed its school colors from *purple* and gray to *red* and gray but few can remember as big a controversy as today's mascot issue. Maybe they were thinking of Harold and Eugene's multi-colored legs instead.

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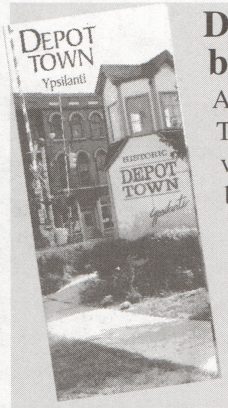
For forty years, the Donald Fleig family has been bringing produce from their Monroe County farm to Ypsilanti's Farmers' Market on Wednesday and Saturday mornings.

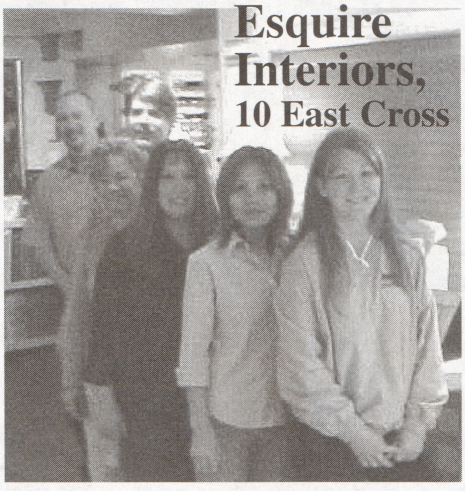
Kermit Letterfrog's Top Ten Reasons why it's great to be a frog

10. Babes are always kissing you because they think you'll turn into a prince.
9. Flies in your soup are a bonus.
8. You're above toads on the food chain.
7. Green goes with absolutely everything!
6. Pond Scum is a term of endearment.
5. Most restaurants have a "no croaking" section.
4. Amphibians are at a minimum risk of appearing on Geraldo.
3. You can scratch hard-to-reach places with your tongue.
2. You can donate your body to science for big bucks!
1. It sure beats being a newt.



DDA slicker boosts the block

A shiny, new Depot Town Downtown Development Authority brochure features local events and a directory to neighborhood businesses. Look for them at every business on the block and send them to folks who have not yet discovered this tiny island of contemporary practicality.



Esquire Interiors, 10 East Cross

Joe Gramer, Ted Barron, Pam Cripe, Joanna Thompson, Liqian Jia, Brittany Shaney

Staff and customers at Esquire Interiors can see the Huron River rush by from the west-facing windows of their showrooms at the end of the block. Ted and Pam worked in the shop their parents began in 1952 and Ted is now president of the company serving Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Plymouth, Brighton and surrounding areas.

In the August *Rag*:

New facts on old customs as we get ready for the 28th annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival and turn ourselves into a weekend of Walt Disney World.

May/June drawing winner:

Kathy Winterhalter was the winner of 25 "Depot Town Bucks" in the May/June drawing. The volunteer intern coordinator at Safe House Center on Clark Road turned in her coupon (see below) at Salt City Antiques. She and husband Mark also frequent Cady's and Sidetrack when they come into town from their home in Superior Township.

Depot Town Rag

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www.depottown.org

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Pattie Harrington, Vice President
Ray Strassel, Treasurer
Sandee French,
Secretary & Past President
Kim Tucker,
Marketing Committee chair
DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Harrington's Standard Printing, 120 East Cross Street.

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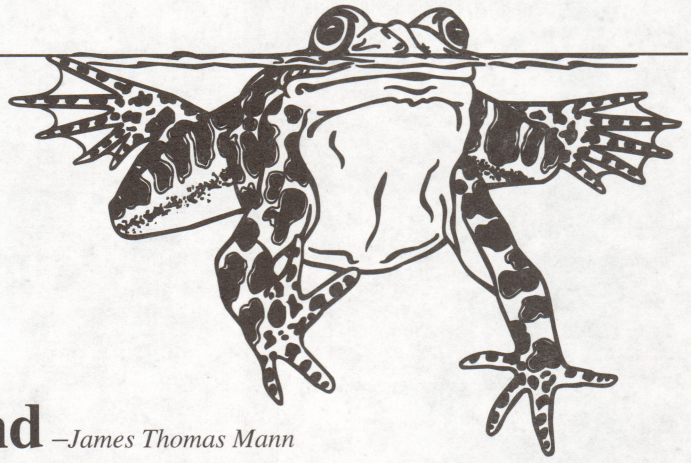
A Frog Island time line:

1820s -1904 Flour mill/saw mill
1904 - Park rumor in the press
1910-20 - Hobo jungle
1920s - City property
1933-1970 - YHS athletic field
1961 - James Bond's rocket car
1970s - City Park realized
1980s - Jazz performances



The true story of Frog Island

–James Thomas Mann

Those who are new to the city of Ypsilanti may think Frog Island a strange name for a park. They may think this because first, there are no frogs on Frog Island, and second, because it is not an island. A study of the history of Frog Island will, however, show it is the perfect name for the park.

The story of Frog Island begins in the early days of Ypsilanti when what is now the park was a flood plain. A race was dug across the flood plain in either the late 1820s or early 1830s to provide power for a flour mill. The race began just south of Forest Avenue and ended just under Cross Street Bridge. The mill stood facing what is now Cross Street about where the Nelson Amos Studio and Salt City Antiques are now. The mill was demolished in 1925 to make room for the present building.

The first person to make use of Frog Island seems to have been H.R. Scovill.

Henry Roswell Scovill was born in Cleveland, Ohio on 28 January 1843. His family moved to Ypsilanti in the 1850s. Scovill enlisted in the Union Army on April 22 1861, and served in company H of the First Michigan Infantry. After the war he spent three years in California before returning to Ypsilanti and entering the lumber business. Scovill and his partner Joseph Follmore, operated a saw mill and lumber yard at the north end of Frog Island near the Forest Avenue bridge. This seems to have been a good place for their business– until the flood in the spring of 1904. After the flood the partnership was dissolved and Scovill operated a lumberyard at Jarvis and Huron streets.

"A rumor," reported *The Ypsilanti Evening Press* of Tuesday, 16 August 1904, "has been going around town the past day or two that the Michigan Central railroad intended to make a park out of Frog Island. H.R. Scovill, who had his lumberyard there, had enough trouble over last Spring's freshets to last him a life time, and for that reason removed it from its old stamping grounds. The railroad officials know nothing about the proposed scheme, but the local force hopes that it will go through."

This may have been the first time the name Frog Island was used in print, but from the way the story is worded, it is clear everyone was expected to know where Frog Island was. The origin of the name is now forgotten. One possible answer was suggested by Tom Dodd and Carolyn McKeever in a short history of Frog Island, written for the Frog Island Festival program book. "Local lore," wrote Dodd and McKeever, "has it that folks hanging around the railroad district often became disoriented in their use of time and used 'a frog hunting expedition on the island' as their alibi when they returned home the next morning." A more likely, if less humorous, explanation is, frogs from the river enjoyed sunning themselves along the shore.

For a time, Frog Island was a hobo jungle. The hobos traveling on a passing freight train would spend a few days before taking another freight out. By the 1920s, Frog Island had become the property of the city. The city, however, did not seem to know what to do with it. The city tried to turn it into a park but had little success. The island was deeded to the Ypsilanti Public Schools in 1933. The district turned the island over to Ypsilanti High School—then one block away on Cross Street—for use as an athletic field. It was at this time a track, football field, tennis courts and lights were installed. Use of the island as an athletic field was most likely made possible by the construction of the levee along the river, ending the annual spring flooding. This also allowed the island to be used for other activities as well.

It was here, in 1961, that James Bond drove his rocket car. James Bond, an instructor in transportation and power at Ypsilanti High School, had somehow acquired a J-34 Navy Banshee jet engine from war surplus in 1955. Bond and his students mounted the engine on a Ford chassis and took it for a run on Frog Island. "It was turned up to 1200 HP," reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of Thursday, 18 May 1961, "and used 12 gallons of fuel per mile."

The high school moved in the early 1970s, and Frog Island once again became the property of the city. The first Frog Island Jazz Festival was held in 1981.

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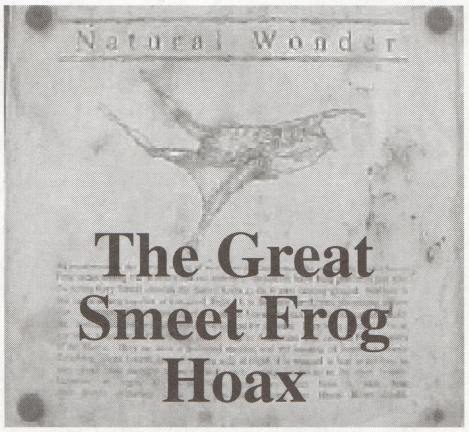

The Great Smeet Frog Hoax

The 2001 Smeet Frog plaque

No special issue can tell frog stories without including the district's most famous tale:

A fourth grade teacher from Harper Woods wrote to complain about not being able to find "The Nocturnal Smeet Frog" announced on a plaque mounted on the "tridge" at the Huron River. She wrote to various herpetologists around the country who inferred it was "a hoax" and "a joke."

"After a discussion" with her class, she said, "we decided that if it were meant to be a joke, then it should have some kind of indication to let people know that it was a joke. My students were concerned that other people, including other children, would read the signs and believe that frogs have fur."

"Please help us to understand the meaning behind this sign and our 'Smeet Frog' mystery," she pleaded.

Mayor Cheryl Farmer, being a true Ypsilantian, responded: "Think how much you all learned about frogs when you took on the task of researching the Smeet. And wasn't it fun? Now perhaps you would like to research the location of your funny bone? And the best habitat for hunting snipe. The world is full of mysteries, jokes and surprises. Enjoy them."

Daniel B. Saybor of Taylor encouraged the teacher and her tots to " come to realize, that not all things of nature are yet known by our feeble race, and that scientific inquiry, in our age of modern science, is still fallible."

Those kids should be in tenth grade by now—if they passed the MEAP Frog exam.

We need you

Looking for a way to be involved in Depot Town festivals this summer?

For a booth or to volunteer, e-mail festivals@depottown.org

RAGTIME

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August 18, 19, 20
Ypsilanti Heritage Festival
"Bridge to tracks—leave no cracks!" is the motto of DTA's Marketing Committee as it "pulls crowds into the Depot Town retail-service-restaurant area to enhance the experience by creating an exciting, professional and seamless display from the bridge eastward." A brochure has gone out to all local businesses encouraging full participation in the district's biggest event.

Heritage Festival applications should be returned to Tucker at The Gifted Basket, 35 E. Cross St. (480-0764) ASAP.

Stick your very local ad in *The Rag*
Contact Kim Tucker @ 480.0764

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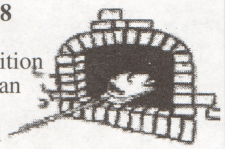

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